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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#) [KU](#)
SUBJECT: KUWAITI POLITICAL FIGURES EXPRESS CONCERN,
CONFUSION ON IRAQ AND IRAN

Classified By: CDA Matthew H. Tueller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C/NF) Summary: A broad cross section of prominent Kuwaiti political figures expressed concern and uncertainty regarding Iraq, Iran and regional strategic issues at an Embassy-hosted diwaniyya (traditional evening gathering) featuring visiting Army War College Professor Dr. W. Andrew Terrill. Most criticized the U.S. approach to Iran, with some accusing it of a double-standard on nuclear weapons issues while others said that the lack of direct contacts with Tehran was a serious blunder. The Kuwaitis were engaged, though not completely reassured by Terrill's assessment that an American attack on Iran was unlikely and expressed concern that such an attack could have serious consequences for regional U.S. allies like Kuwait. While a number of prominent Kuwaitis have publicly called on the U.S. to withdraw from Iraq, those assembled clearly found a U.S. withdrawal worrisome because of the spillover effects on Kuwait of an Iraqi "implosion." Several of the participants made the familiar point that all U.S. efforts in the Middle East are hampered by its unbalanced role in regard to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, even on issues such as Iraq and Iran that are not directly related to the conflict. End Summary.

¶2. (C/NF) PolChief hosted a diwaniyya April 15 for a cross-section of influential Kuwaitis -- including liberals, academics, Islamists, and influential military figures -- at which Army War College Professor and member of the Baker/Hamilton Iraq Study Group Dr. W. Andrew Terrill stressed the importance of US-Kuwait relations in the context of regional security threats. Terrill pointed out that Kuwait's home-grown democracy and strong national unity made it a bastion of stability with whom the United States should strengthen its ties. He warned that Iraq could devolve into a Lebanon-like civil war, in which case Kuwait would likely be plagued with spillover terrorism and possibly refugees. He also warned that Iran had a history of terrorism in Kuwait and could cause trouble in the future. Terrill emphasized the importance of Kuwait having a plan, coordinated with the U.S., in case regional security significantly deteriorates.

Kuwaitis Urge Engagement with Iran

¶3. (C/NF) On Iran, the Kuwaitis emphasized direct engagement. Abdulmuhsin Taqqi Al-Muzaffar, a prominent liberal Shi'a, said the U.S. had exaggerated the threat of Iran's nuclear program and should open up lines of communication with Tehran and Damascus. Ahmad Bishara, one of Kuwait's leading liberals and the head of a liberal political association, found it strange that the U.S. maintained relations with the USSR throughout the Cold War

but had not sent an envoy to Iran, especially since the USSR was a much greater threat. He said talking had worked with Libya and North Korea, so the U.S. should try it with Iran. Bishara wondered whether Israel had "vetoed" such a dialogue.

Hamad Al-Matar, a leading Kuwaiti scientist and ICM (Islamic Constitutional Movement - the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood) member expressed concern with the technical abilities of the Iranians to maintain their nuclear facilities safely. He also worried how Iran would respond in case of a U.S. attack and how that might affect Kuwait. Terrill argued that an attack was unlikely, emphasizing especially the issues of timing and the U.S. commitment to explore diplomatic alternatives first. He described Defense Secretary Gates as a careful analyst who would give "good

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advice" to the President. Terrill concluded by saying that the other GCC states were beginning to share the depth of Kuwait's concerns about Iran's nuclear program.

Concerns about Effect of Iraq Deterioration on Kuwait

14. (C/NF) Kuwait University Political Science Professor and head of the American Studies Department, Dr. Abdullah Shayji, noted that the U.S. public seemed to be reaching a "breaking point" with regard to U.S. involvement in Iraq. Though Shayji frequently attacks U.S. strategy and tactics in his newspaper columns, he clearly was worried about a hasty U.S. retreat. Terrill predicted that the breaking point would probably be November 2007; if major improvements had not occurred by then, political pressure would build quickly for some kind of pullout. Terrill suggested Kuwaitis ought to be thinking now about how they will respond to worst-case scenarios. Liberal Shi'a former Oil Minister Ali Al-Baghli expressed concern about whether the Iraqis had truly accepted

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the U.N.-demarcated border and whether the U.S. would stand by Kuwait if Iraq once again attacked Kuwait. Ahmad Bishara saw the conflicts within Iraq as intractable and recommended dividing Iraq into three states. Kuwait University Computer Scientist Ahmad Al-Munayyes pointed out that Kuwaiti politics is driven more by identity than by issues, and that an explosion in Iraq might lead to a deterioration in Sunni-Shi'a relations in Kuwait.

Solve the Arab-Israeli Conflict

15. (C/NF) Several of the Kuwaitis noted that the Israel-Palestine issue would continue to poison U.S. efforts in the region until a just solution is reached. Retired Major General Dr. Mohammed Razouki suggested that if Israel made a commitment to returning the Golan to Syria, it would open up room for talks. Terrill encouraged the Kuwaitis to be realistic and to "out-reasonable" the Israelis by publicly supporting peace talks in a way that would put the onus on the Israelis to respond.

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